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Letter to a Swedenborgian - 1847

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TRACTS FOR THE NEW TIMES.

No. I.

LETTER TO A SWEDENBORGIAN.

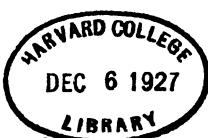
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I FEAR YET THIS IRON YOKE OF OUTWARD CONFORMITY HATH  
LEFT A SLAVISH PRINT UPON OUR NECKS; THE GHOST OF  
A LINEN DECENTY YET HAUNTS US.—JOHN MILTON.

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New Church Theological School,  
Cambridge

## A LETTER, &c.

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MY DEAR SIR:

WERE I to speak in the manner of the *old* times, I should pronounce your ecclesiastical movement a schism. I should be clear in doing this, because in introducing as you have done a new baptism, you have by necessary implication introduced a new faith. But the old times have passed away. There is no specific authority now on the earth to adjudge heresy and schism. The inevitable admission of the right of private judgment, resolved all such authority thenceforth into the universal sentiment of the race. If every man may doubtless read the Scriptures for himself, there can be no need of an authorized teaching class. Admit the right of private judgment in things sacred, and you leave no place for a clergy, in the proper sense of that institution, as the *authoritative* expounders of the sacred text, and consequently give *carte blanche* to all manner of heresy and schism. We indeed still claim our Reverends, and right-Reverends, who are individually a very estimable body of men, but who nevertheless in no sense of the word are a true clergy. Their use is simply to conduct congregational worship, and to act as the advocates and champions of a particular creed, exalting it above all its rivals. They are appointed by the various sects, each to maintain the tenets of his sect unimpaired, and unimproved. Not one of them would be recognized by the *whole* titular church, as a capable expounder of divine truth. Hence they have none of them authority to adjudge heresy and schism absolutely, or for the whole body

of the church, but only for their own particular faction. In truth I see not how any consistent adherent of the old times, that is to say, any one whose idea of the church necessarily involves that of a congregation and a clergy, can slight the perfectly logical claim which Rome makes upon him.

Accordingly I shall not affect the phrase of the old times, and pronounce your movement schismatical. I shall speak to you in the manner exclusively of the *new* times, and prove it utterly incongruous with the idea of the new, or universal, church.

Your movement is based upon an inadequate conception of the nature of the church. You do not view it as existing for distinctively human, that is, universal, ends. You regard it as its own end. "The church," says Swedenborg, "is a man"; and it involves therefore every rightful element of human life. Thus it is a most real and universal existence, co-extensive with the experience of human nature. You on the contrary make it a purely factitious, or artificial, existence, having no relation to man as man, but simply as Christian man, or Pagan man, Jewish man or Gentile man. It stands, say you, in the variable intellect, not in the common life, of the race. But the difference between you will appear as we proceed.

No reader of Swedenborg needs be told, that the phrase "old church", as applied to any, or all, of the sects of his day, and the phrase "new church", as applied to any rival corporation either *in esse* or *in posse*, never once occur throughout his writings. He could not have so applied them, without manifest self-contradiction. For the new church, being, according to his representation, a spiritual or universal economy, (embracing all men throughout the earth of whatever color or creed, who, through the cordial rejection of evils from the life, are in the internal acknowledgment of the Divine Humanity,) must, by his own shewing, forever disavow every visible or literal limitation. He does not hesitate to declare indeed with all plainness, that the church descended from the Apostles had come to an end by its total immersion in evils and falsities, and yet in the same breath he declares that "*very few*" of its mem-

bers were partakers of its corruptions, intimating that they prevailed chiefly with the leaders or rulers of the church.

Evidently then you and Swedenborg entertain very different ideas of the church, for with your notion these statements of his would be wholly unintelligible. In order to comprehend his views we shall find it necessary to enlarge our conception of the church somewhat to the measure of his own: And yet so remarkable a change has come over Christendom since his time, that it must be admitted to be rather difficult to do this. However let us try.

At Swedenborg's day it might still be said with truth that the Christian church embraced all Christendom. Although many of the larger sects were flourishing, and others were constantly steaming into notice, yet the whole of Christendom managed to get toleration in one quarter or another, and the observance of the christian ordinances of worship, and the possession of the christian name were denied to no man. Every nation had its religious establishment, of which all its citizens were members by virtue of their birth, and Christendom and the Church of Christ were accordingly still one and the same idea. The church was still a civil institution, intimately blended with the political life of the nations, and by no means, as now, the mere nursery of a self-involved pietism. This latter development had got an occasional glimpse of the day, in the case of the Lollards, the Quakers, the Puritans, &c., but it had never become general or reputable. The last of its forms had quietly subsided into Independency, Presbyterianism, and other influences, whose aims and aspirations were eminently political. Thus notwithstanding the conflict which each of the sects waged against the others, they all alike struggled for political vitality and influence, all alike laid their grasp upon the civil society. EVANGELICAL RELIGION, as it is termed, (*quasi lucus a non lucendo,*) had not then risen with its tests of "inward experience," to divide Christendom into "the church" and "the world;" and the mass of the people apparently still believed that to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God, were the sum of the Christian life.

It is evident then that Swedenborg's theory of the Church

must have involved many things, of which ours at this day, and especially in this land, is wholly destitute. Our idea of the church is a very meagre and mean one. It is that of a collection of men, episcopally or otherwise organized, meeting together on Sundays for public worship. Abstract public worship, and you reduce the church to nonentity. It is with us an institution for public worship, destitute alike of civil and political significance, possessing no shadow either of governmental or magisterial influence. It is a thing as much divorced from the ordinary interests and life of humanity, and hence from heaven, as the institution of Freemasonry, being wholly set apart to the advocacy of our interests beyond the grave. As at present constituted it is the citadel and shield of individualism, or the selfish principle, to the maintenance of which all its legislation is addressed. It wholly ignores all questions of political and social reform, or if it does recognize them at all, it is only to stigmatize their gathering urgency with the name of "infidelity." But if "infidelity" do the church's proper work ; if it receive the inflowing truths of heaven, and apply them to social practice ; if it prosecute the relief of human woe, and the conquest of human wickedness ; if it affirm every assured conviction of the intellect, and every innocent hope of the heart ; then what is there to hinder "infidelity" becoming the true church of God ? Is God a respecter of persons ? Does He care for names ?

Swedenborg had no such superficial notion of the church. His conception of it could not but involve the idea of the highest social use. The church up to his time was inseparably bound up with the government of society, and the question of its vigor or decline was simply a question therefore of social advancement or retrocession. It was a question of the virtue of Christendom, whether it was increasing or diminishing. The church involved the whole framework of society, involved the relations of the aristocracy (kings, magistrates, and priests) to the people, and the relations of the people to each other ; and accordingly to decide the problem of the church, to ascertain whether it any longer fulfilled the idea of its founder, was only in other words to ascertain and decide whether Christendom

as then politically and ecclesiastically organized, promoted or obstructed the best interests of the race; whether its attitude were favorable or hostile to the advancement of universal humanity. It was an inquiry as to the practical operation of the prevailing social ethics, whether that operation were on the whole favorable or not to the melioration of the common life of man. It was no paltry question of sectarian politics, such as your attitude represents it, but a question whether all the sects — whether entire Christendom had not proved false to its mission; whether instead of any longer upholding and vindicating the divine truth, it had not become itself the pander to all uncleanness and error. Thus it was a far deeper question than any touching the validity of baptisms and sacraments, and one of an intensely practical character.

By "the end of the church," then, Swedenborg must have meant a very different thing from that which you ascribe to him. He means no such platitude, as that the public worship of his time was become corrupt, and was about to be superseded by a purer one. Public worship was then as now an apt expression of public sentiment, and the way to amend the one therefore would be through the gradual amendment of the other. But at all events Swedenborg occupied himself with none of these trivialities. He never intimated a quarrel with the formal worship of the sects, (except once, in regard to the withholding of the cup from the laity by the Rómish church;) never says that the ordinances of ritual worship had been vitiating by the corruption of the priesthood, but broadly denies the possibility of any such thing; and confines his view wholly to the real or interior worship of the church, which he defines as standing in charity or mutual love, and of which he declares it for the most part destitute. This was his sole care, to assert the eternal and indefeasible ethical principle. He proved charity and not selfishness to be the bond of society. He declared the inherent vice of all class or personal legislation; of every custom and law whose beginning, middle and end did not lie in charity. The monarch might have never so absolute a personal right to the allegiance of the subject; he had no true or divine right save in so far as the subject's welfare was

his paramount concern. The priest might have every accredited claim to the support of the people : he had no divine claim save in so far as his primary interest was their furtherance and growth in all truth. The husband and the wife might have every legal right to each other's person : they had no divine right but what sprang from mutual love, or their internal meet- ness one for the other. So of parent and child, brother and sister, master and servant, friend and neighbor—in short, of every relation, natural, personal, and civil—he sank his unsparing probe through the accumulated corruptions to the truly divine depths of each, and brought to light the shrunken and nearly extinct virtue which yet sanctified them all. The divinely generated *proprium*, or selfhood, in man, he declared, was charity ; and he traced the law to its outermost issues, proving virtue to be the only unimpeachable title to privilege or property in any sphere, and denying permanence to every institution, however hallowed by usage and prejudice, which does not of its own nature promote innocent relations between man and man.

The church, then, according to Swedenborg, had come to its end in this respect, that the life of charity was extinct in it. Among individuals, indeed, especially of the humbler classes, a remnant of it was still to be found ; but in the high places of the church, among kings and magistrates and priests, it was scarcely, if at all, visible. Up to the time of the Reformation, although the doctrines of predestination, of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, of the imputation of sin and righteousness, and justification by faith, were recognized in the church, yet they were to a great extent neutralized in practice by the doctrine of justification by works ; a doctrine logically inconsistent indeed with the others, but none the less acceptable to the unperverted conscience of the simple. The tyranny and corruptions of the hierarchy had then however reached their limit, and that famous Reformation took place which gave rise to the modern sectarism, and put out the little light that was still left in Christendom, by the public ratification, among the Christian powers, of the hideous dogma of “ justification by faith without works.” Hitherto charity had been long sus-

pended between life and death, scarcely vigorous enough to be called alive, scarcely feeble enough to be called dead. Protestantism at length gave it the *coup de grace*, and dismissed it to its native skies.

From this time forth Christendom became the scene of endless and desolating wars, set on foot by the avarice and ambition of the reigning powers, and ending only in the impoverishment and debasement of their people. The church of Christ resembled a huge Pandemonium, in which every giant lust stalked abroad uncontrolled : every internal bond between it and heaven seemed snapped asunder : the lives and happiness of the people were remorselessly squandered to advance the flimsiest schemes of royal and priestly ambition ; the offended vanity of a king's mistress was, in fact, a sufficient pretext for the slaughter of unoffending thousands ; the highest places of dignity were bought and sold ; the administration of justice even was polluted by shameless venality ; and thus bad sped on bad, until the whole of Christendom became one mass of festering corruption, in the comparison of which the tranquil tents of heathenism shone forth like the innocent abodes of the blest.

I have not the space here, however, to justify, by a minute appeal to history, Swedenborg's allegation of the close of the Christian Church in the middle of the last century. Every reader may do this for himself at his leisure. He will find, in the events which preceded and in those which have followed the alleged date of that catastrophe, an ample warrant of his allegation ; while he will discover in the subject matter of the allegation itself the only sufficient theory of the events.

But however this may be, I am only concerned here to protest in the most earnest manner, against your ascribing to Swedenborg any such inadequate ideas of the church, as your position implies, and to maintain that in his view the church meant, when regarded in its totality, *the constituted social order of Christendom*. By the Christian Church he meant, as he himself has explained it, "the tract of country where the word was possessed and read ;" he meant the public order of Christendom, based upon the principle of an hereditary aristocracy, and involving the whole framework of society — involving the en-

forced subjection of the peasant to the peer, of the laity to the clergy, of the slave to the master, of the ignorant to the learned. So long as charity had maintained its foothold in Christendom, this order had served to connect men with heaven. In fulfilling its established relations, both the peer and the peasant, the priest and the laic, the master and the slave, the scholar and the pupil, had felt some other bond than that of a reciprocal selfishness, prompting each to love only himself in the other. So long consequently the established order was productive of good to both parties: so long in other words the church stood connected with heaven. But now all this was changed. The multiplication of conflicting interests consequent upon the Reformation, the incessant and envenomed struggle for power to which all the nations were abandoned, had communicated a blight to every sphere of social life, and more or less corrupted every relation which man bore to his fellow. An infidelity of the most besotted kind had taken the place of the early faith and earnestness: the sacred truths of the Word of God, which had never indeed been unfolded in their rational depth, had long been buried under the glosses of a false theology; but now the very existence of spiritual things, the very existence of God even, had become, as we learn from the memoirs of the time, objects of flippant derision to the princes of the church, and the great ideas of immortality and of heaven and hell, were considered only as inventions of the wise to awe the vulgar.

It was at this juncture that Swedenborg announced the consummation of the first Christian Church, or its utter desolation as to goodness and truth. Now the credibility of this anhunciation to us, depends, not so much upon the proof of Swedenborg's spiritual illumination, as upon the nature of the fact itself, and its antecedent probability. If on the one hand we accept his statement of the nature of the church, and its relation to the life of man on the earth, and on the other hand, accept the testimony of history in regard to the state of Christendom, I imagine we shall scarcely need the proof of his spiritual experience to convince us of the truth of his affirmation. He represents the church as sustaining the same relation to the race

of man on the earth, as the heart and lungs sustain to the rest of the body. As the heart and lungs mediate between the internal and external things of the body, so, says he, does the church mediate between heaven and earth. Now heaven is an exhaustless fountain of blessing to the universal life of man in nature. All the advancement which the natural life is capable of receiving, all the good and truth which nature is capable of embodying and illustrating, have their source in heaven. And inasmuch as the church is the earthly depositary and guardian of heavenly truths, so it is the channel through which heavenly influences descend to enrich the natural life. To ascertain then whether the church any longer performs its mediatorial function, and so remains the church, we have to inquire not what Swedenborg or any one else says of it, but how it uses the universal truths of which it is the depositary, whether for its own aggrandizement, or for the benefit of the common life of man ? We have to enquire how it stands related to human progress, or what are the prevailing influences it sheds forth upon the nations ? If its influence be to foster every improvement of the common life of humanity ; if it cordially welcomes every addition to the sum of human comfort, and labors to give it diffusion ; if it develops every truth of science and every method of art whose effect is to equalize the enjoyment of human life ; if, rejoicing to stand in the van of humanity and to be the channel of heaven's best gifts to earth, it postpones all question of its own revenues to the grand question of the redemption of the race from ignorance and sin, then no one can doubt that it is a true church, blessed both of God and man. But if it enact an exactly contrary course to this ; if it accept no truth in science or art but what makes for its own glory ; if it exalt its own dogmas into the standard of opinion for the race ; if it monopolize to itself every advance of human invention, and become a miserable trader in the bounties of Providence, seeking always to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer ; if in short in every practicable way, it deny the universal love and providence of God, calling itself the exclusive people of God, and claiming thereupon the allegiance of every other people, then can one as little doubt that it is a false church, accursed both of God and man.

Now this latter is the picture which history gives us of the state of Christendom at Swedenborg's time, and his own testimony, based upon a profounder analysis of its condition, fully corroborates it. Thus the antecedent probabilities of the church having reached its consummation, are very strong. If we take Swedenborg's view of the nature of the church, they are quite irresistible, and no more to be denied than the death of the heart and lungs would be, when the one had ceased to beat, and the others to respire.

The confirmation which Swedenborg's annunciation receives also from subsequent events, is very remarkable. To say nothing of the absolute new birth which the sciences have experienced since that event, evincing a far more orderly influx into nature than had ever before taken place, let us glance for a moment at our own national economy, which offers a very full confirmation of the fact in question. We are a nation without an aristocracy, and without a priesthood. We have all manner of private aristocracies and private priesthoods, representing divided individual sentiment, but we have none representing the united national sentiment: we have no national aristocracy and no national creed. Whatever of either exists amongst us, does so by tolerance, not by appointment. The people of this land earnestly seeking to secure the freest development of their human faculties, and the highest possible enjoyment of life, did not feel the established institutions of Christendom to be necessary to that end, and they made no provision for them in their polity. This is a pregnant fact in modern history, that wise and good men, in framing what they deemed the best possible scheme of national prosperity, wholly omitted from it every merely professional institution, leaving all such to the contingencies of private fancy and individual resources. Neither their own nor their children's earthly welfare in their opinion called for such institutions, and they provided none. No doubt most of these men had class preferences, and sectarian attachments: no doubt each of them loved his own class and his own sect better than any other, and would have rejoiced in their aggrandizement; and yet they one and all felt the general life of man, or the universal earthly inte-

rests of humanity, to be so wholly unrelated to the purposes of any class or sect as such, as cheerfully to exclude them all from the national polity.

This fact, I say, strikes me as a pregnant proof of the consummation of the nominal Christian Church. Not otherwise could such a phenomenon have appeared. We present the spectacle of the legitimate children of that church, when providentially summoned to construct a polity which should best promote their own and their children's earthly welfare, deliberately renouncing all its distinctive institutions. As a nation we reject the name and the institutions of Christendom. Nationally we are out of Christendom. This may be a happy or an unhappy circumstance to us, as we severally feel about it: but of the circumstance itself I apprehend there can be no question. And the only explanation it admits of, in my opinion, is that which Swedenborg alleges, viz., that the Christian Church regarded as an outward or literal economy has in truth come to its end, or fails any longer to connect the human race with heaven.

But, at all events, I repeat that the church in Swedenborg's idea was one with the moral life of Christendom, as contained in its social, political, and ecclesiastical institutions. The life of man therein exhibited was debased by the gradual extinction of charity, or brotherly love, as a recognized principle of public action. Christendom was not then, any more than now, destitute of enthusiastic piety. But piety was no equivalent in his estimation for charity. He had a just regard for piety: he thought it beautiful in its sphere, beautiful as an expression of individual temperament, but its sphere was not that of life. This sphere belongs to charity wholly. Piety was good then, he said, only when charity gave it life. Apart from charity it was dead, and sure to plunge its conceited votary into all manner of aridity and acridity. Swedenborg's hope for the church then did not lie in any increase of its piety, since in the nature of things piety could be no substitute for charity. His popular contemporaries, Wesley and Whitfield, were of a different opinion. They too deplored the evils of Christendom, but they thought the true panacea lay in the increase of its piety. They

set about an agitation to this effect, and accomplished it to some extent. What has been the result? Is the state of Christendom any better now than it was before? I admit that it exhibits an increase in piety of course; but what I ask is this, has its increase in piety produced any proportionate increase of human prosperity? Is the general life of man in Christendom one whit less miserable, one whit more elevated on that account? Every candid observer must answer in the negative. For it is the peculiarity of what is called "evangelical religion," to deaden men's sympathies for the actual and present ills of humanity, in favor of their possible future ills; and so to neutralize much of the energy which would otherwise have been available for the mitigation of human suffering. I joyfully acknowledge that the human mind has received an impulse of elevation within the last century, to which we find no parallel in the past. But what I affirm is, that the "evangelical" movement in the church is in no manner entitled to the credit of this achievement. It has always been hostile to it. For so far as its influence has extended, it has had the unhappy effect of disturbing the true rationality of the human mind, and so of withering its beneficent action. It has taught its subjects to regard God as the true author of calamity, and to spend their whole lives in deprecating his wrath and vengeance. It has taught them to regard nature as an unprogressive field, accursed by the arbitrary fiat of God, to be softened by no tears, to be enriched by no toil of its victims. It is essentially anti-social. It cares only for its own soul. The ameliorating progress of science accordingly in late years has met with nothing but obstruction from the progress of so called "evangelical religion." They are in fact the antagonist influences of the day.

Swedenborg was bound to reject piety therefore as the all-sufficient remedy for the evils of Christendom. Still less sympathy, if that were possible, had he with the Romish error, now becoming English also, of the church being constituted by the Word and its sacraments. "The Church of God", he every where affirms, "is A MAN"—in all the height and breadth of that much-abused word. Whosoever is internally a

man, by the conscientious rejection of evils from the life, is a church in its least, and therefore its purest form. And the church universal is a church, only because it is made up of veritable men. "The Lord's kingdom in the earths, says he, consists of all those who are principled in good, and who, though dispersed throughout the whole orb of earths, are still one, and as members constitute one body. Such is the Lord's kingdom in the heavens; there the universal heaven resembles one man, who is therefore called (*maximus homo*) THE CHIEF MAN." Whatsoever there be then of purity in human affection, of truth in human intellect, of beauty or beneficence in human action, these, according to Swedenborg, and a greater than Swedenborg, constitute the Church of God on earth. Men may inherit very various theologies, but charity in the life melts and fuses all these varieties into indistinguishable unity. Thus the church stands utterly aloof from persons and places. It despairs the generation of space and time. It is the marriage of Goodness and Truth in the human soul, and it becomes visible only in the legitimate offspring of such marriage, which are just or benevolent actions.

If the foregoing sketch be true to fact, as I think you must admit it to be, you will readily see how widely your idea of the church, as exhibited in your practice, differs from that of the new, or universal church. You are in fact only a new sect, with no organic difference from the old sects, save in your acknowledgment of Swedenborg's writings. You profess to believe in the same Lord now that you did before you ever heard the name of Swedenborg; the same Lord whom every Christian sect professes to believe in just as truly, though not so intelligently, as your own. "Ah!" say you, "these sects merely acknowledge him outwardly, whereas we ——." Indeed you may well pause there. The inward acknowledgment of the Lord is not a theme for boasting. It involves I conceive something more than a belief in Swedenborg. It involves something more than any degree of light in the understanding. It certainly involves a state of heart totally alien to the unchurching of every sect but our own. Watch well your footsteps here. I lately had occasion to find a friend of yours, sensible man as he

is on all ordinary topics, a dupe of the shallowest sophistry on this. He talked of your body making an *internal acknowledgment* of the truths of the Word. But on questioning his assurance on this point, it turned out that he only meant to say that they made an acknowledgment of the *internal truths* of the Word. He had used the words so often and so heedlessly, that the “*internal acknowledgment*” of the truths, and the acknowledgment of the “*internal truths*,” had come to stand for the same idea. You will admit that a man may make a very zealous acknowledgment of the internal word, and yet be very far from its “*internal acknowledgment*.” If your people as a body are in both acknowledgments, why truly you are a happy people, and the more averse should you be to claim a monopoly of the distinction. But the supposition is absurd. Like all other sects professing the name of Christ, each with a vital difference, as it conceives, from every other, you have doubtless much that is good among you, and much that is evil. And yet for my own part I am free to confess that you appear to me to be free, as a sect, from many of the weaknesses which beset the others. While some of these bodies are occupying themselves with purely ecclesiastical extension, and compassing sea and land to make one proselyte; and others are pilfering the Romish church of its festivals and fasts, to make them grotesque and contemptible by a purely wilful observance; and others still are fulminating the gravest anathemas against whist, dancing and the drama; you in many respects are busy with questions of vital morality, on whose right adjustment the Providential destiny of humanity will ere long mainly depend. You willingly identify yourselves with many ideas that have a real human interest, and are to that extent aiding the empire of divine Truth. This could hardly be otherwise, considering your familiarity with the educative lore of Swedenborg. But it is none the less true that when on the ground of these favorable personal differences, you proceed to call yourselves “the church,” and even to rob the christian ordinances of all “*validity*” as administered by the other sects, you do much to defeat the benignant influence you might otherwise exert upon society, and repel the sympathy of every generous mind.

Swedenborg looked upon sectarianism or separationism as a crying evil of Christendom. He thought that a difference of opinion on doctrinal subjects, ought never to divide those who were intent on reducing the divine commandments to life. He thought that various opinions on these subjects were not only inevitable, but desirable, as more fully attesting the true *living* unity of the church. But your separationism has a peculiarly odious aggravation. The ordinary sects justify their exclusiveness on the plea that others reject some doctrine of the inspired word, which to their eyes is palpably present in it. You put this paltry zeal to the blush, by excluding from your fellowship all those who do not acknowledge the writings of Swedenborg. You exclude not only those who professing to admire the writings of Swedenborg, disagree with you as to their interpretation, but the far greater number of those who actually knowing nothing of your doctrines, have never had *any* opinion about them one way or another. This is a sectarianism that makes all the other sectarianism of the day, almost seem like true christianity. It is to exclude from the "new church," the most exemplary and divinely attested men in Christendom, for no other reason than that they have either not heard of your favorite author, or having heard calumnious statements only, do not in all honesty care to make his acquaintance. I can pardon the aptitude which ignorant or frivolous people shew to rank Swedenborg among the fanatics, when those who know the perfect humility of the man, and his total destitution of personal pretension, do not hesitate to render him this sickening idolatry. I have actually seen an elaborate attempt made in one of your periodicals, to exalt Swedenborg's *infallibility* into an article of faith ; and I have never yet heard the slightest disclaimer of its propriety. Has puerility a lower deep than this ?

According to Swedenborg (*Last Judgment*) the new economy was to supervene not as a new visible sect, but as a spirit of freedom and rationality in the old sects. It *has* come, or rather is now coming, as a spirit of Love among all the sects, flinging a veil of obscurity over those obtrusive doctrinals, whose fruit has always been disunion, and bringing into light those hidden charities whose only possible issue is peace. And if you had

wished to exhibit this spirit in your embodiment for public worship, thus to afford the world some living illustration of the church that is coming, your course would now have conciliated the unmixed approbation of every friend of human progress. “A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.” How blessed a distinction had it been for you to command to all the sects this “new doctrine” of charity, as one which had been all along involved indeed in their acknowledgment of the Lord, but had never got the hearty recognition it was so amply entitled to: to command it to them not only by studied words of eulogy, but by a diligent practice of its requirements, above all in your social or public worship. But no, you say, this does not suit us. The newness of the church by no means consists in doing its Lord’s will. It is wholly a personal and local affair. It consists in a new baptism, [a new faith, then, also], a new infusion of vigor into the old ordinances, [why not new ordinances outright?], a new ministry, a new ritual of worship, in short a new visible corporation or sect, defined by a uniform baptism, and the maintenance of precisely similar religious opinions. Thus, consistently, you forbid me to take the Lord’s supper, until I shall have undergone this conventional baptism, and admitted this sameness of religious opinion. And thus do you dishonor that new and universal church, whose distinctive glory lies in its opening wide its arms of love to the good of all religions, Christian and Mahometan, Jew and Pagan alike, and degrade its majestic herald into the mere minister of an upstart and conceited ecclesiasticism.

I speak with no unrighteous warmth. Who in view of the light which is pouring into the world at every inlet, and inciting men to an ardor of philanthropic inquiry and action such as they have never before felt; who that beholds the vigorous and searching criticism of our social evils which now abounds,—sure precursor of their speedy disappearance!—and witnesses in our legislative halls, in our scientific and literary assemblies, how the popular heart warms to every avowal of manly or charitable sentiment; who in short that witnesses the new birth which faith and hope and charity now find in every breast, and

sees its divine ground and warrant in the universal truths of the church, can help glowing with shame and indignation, to see those truths systematically perverted from their healing and legitimate purpose, which is the upbuilding of universal humanity, into the exclusive service and glory of the old, and, to all human ends, worthless sectarianism ?

If indeed you were *visibly distinguished* from all other men by the possession of goodness and truth, or the true faith of the Divine Humanity, then you would have some show of reason in claiming our visual acknowledgment of you as the church. “The universal of faith *on man’s part*,” says Swedenborg, “is that he should confide in the Lord’s salvation ; and because none can so confide but he who leads a good life, therefore this is also implied in believing on him.” Dare you lay your hands on your hearts, and say that you alone of all the earth lead a good life ? Thus that you alone of all the earth believe in the Lord ? And if not, what a mere immodesty it is in you to flaunt the distinctive name of new church in our eyes, and stigmatize your rival corporations by that of old church ! Your intellectual assent to these propositions of Swedenborg, does not constitute you a good man, nor a believer in the Lord. Why then, on the simple ground of such assent, do you challenge the world’s visual recognition of you as the Lord’s church ? The world will say with the apostle James that it would rather see your works than your faith, rather see the spirit than the body ! When these shall be found to *distinguish you visibly* from all the rest of mankind, it will be time enough to assert a pretension which under present circumstances appears every way childish and preposterous. “If ye fulfil the royal law of charity, ye do well,” and can afford to be indifferent to every name under heaven, indifferent to all those external gauds which are the life of little minds. “But if ye have respect to persons,” — that is, for example, if you make the personal accident of a man’s attitude towards Swedenborg, the condition of your communion and sympathy, rather than goodness of life, — “ye do ill ;” and the world will not fail to estimate your claim to the name you assume at its true worth.

I am persuaded, my dear sir, that the time has come for sensible men to cease pluming themselves on these small differences from one another. I am very far from counselling the disuse of the ordinances of public worship. I plead solely for the exaltation of their use. I would use them on a scale of enlargement suited to their true internal significance. I would lift them out of their old, limited, and no longer rational function, which is that of separating Christian from Pagan, into their new, universal, and worthy application, which is that of uniting all good men without respect to their formal religious differences, in one divine brotherhood. Rationally acknowledging in Christ the Lord of all worlds — the Father of all the souls that breathe — I would be eager to extend the memorials of his earthly history to every one that claims them, to every soul in whom the faintest image of the divine paternity dwells. If there be not a width in these ordinances sufficient for this purpose, let us at once say so, and lay them aside as no longer congruous with the doctrine of Christ ; but so long as we hold a doctrine of Christ affiliating all the good and truth of humanity to him, let us be ashamed to desecrate the symbols of his presence by either personal or geographical restrictions. Literal Christianity has been hitherto a mere territorial distinction. It must cease to be this, or cease to flourish. It must now expand to the dimensions of spiritual Christianity, or it must cease to claim men's respect. For spiritual Christianity has always disdained territorial limitations, and the true Church of Christ consequently, as Swedenborg shows, has ever been co-extensive with the human race. Whosoever lives a life of charity — I do not mean a life of almsgiving, nor a technically devout life, but a really humane life, by the conscientious avoidance of whatever wrongs the neighbor — is *ipso facto* a member of that church, though he himself have never heard the name of Christ. In a word true humanity constitutes the Church of Christ, and every thing else is “ mere leather and prunella.” This sentiment is getting a wide and deep acceptance of the human mind, and any sect which arrogates to itself another basis, is sure accordingly to reap an increasing harvest of contempt and obloquy. A sect may increase numerically, as

the Romish and several of the others are now doing, but strength lies no longer in numbers, but in truth. The strength of a sect is to be computed now, not by its numbers, but by its relation to human progress, by the measure of its recognition of the enlarging sphere of the human mind. Only in the degree in which it allies itself with the legitimate activity of the human faculties, only as it strives to keep in view the ever widening horizon of truth, is it strong. For truth alone is strong, truth as the instrument of human good. It is becoming stronger than all men, and the sects of the old world accordingly, once so formidable to its dominion, are now rapidly losing their power to injure its feeblest follower. In this new world, we may say they are already totally impotent. The common life of humanity disowns them all. They exist among us wilfully, or as a fruit of the competitive spirit, and not of an honest natural necessity. They represent the conflicting individual opinions, not the calm and unitary sentiment, of the nation. They belong to the old times, when rank was every thing, and man nothing. Their meaning is personal, not human. They are the machinery of sect, not of religion.

I have the greatest respect for the members of these sects as related to the common life and purposes of humanity. I have no respect only for their sectarian relations. I have all esteem for their social excellence, not a whit for their party tactics. And I have the sincerest deference for their honest wants, none at all for their wilfulness. Many of them are my most valued friends and companions. Good husbands are they, good fathers, good neighbors, and good citizens. But the coming church requires them to be something more and better than all this, requires them to be good *men* as well. It requires them to love their fellow man, not because he happens to be their kinsman, or neighbor, or fellow citizen, but simply because he is man. It requires them to love him not for what he has of themselves in him, but exclusively for what he has of *good* in him, or for his proper measure of human worth. The church that makes this demand, is the only legitimate offspring of the Divine Humanity, is the only worthy travail of the Redeemer's soul. And it is, moreover, the clear prophecy of all history.

If history makes any one universal affirmation, it is this ; that the grand disturbing element in human affairs, the one great obstacle to the Providential evolution of human destiny, has been the spirit of individualism, the spirit which prompts man to aggrandize himself at the expense of the common wealth. And if history makes any one promise accordingly more prominent than another, more instinct with divine truth than another, it is this ; that this disturbing influence shall yet be tranquilized, and individual aggrandizement be brought into strictest harmony with universal well-being. I conceive that no person can read history, uninfluenced by private ends, without finding this promise at its very dawn, much more along its middle progress, and most of all in the events which now indicate its rapid fulfilment. Look at the whole Providential history of human nature, at those events which separate the human life from the animal, and compel the instinctive belief of a majestic and elevating Providence in human destiny. First you see individualism in man softened by subjection to the family—and next the tribal—bond; the patriarchal order being the earliest social form known to the race. Afterwards as population increases, you see it still further mitigated by subjection to the municipal bond, the individual being brought into unity not merely with one family or tribe, but with all the families or tribes of one town ; which is the ancient civilization, or the era of Athens and Rome. And finally you see it still further modified by subjection to the national bond, which brings the individual into unity not only with all his fellow townsmen, but with all his fellow countrymen. This is our present civilization. Thus you see the individual unit expanding successively into the family and tribal unity, into the municipal unity, and finally into the national unity. Its great final development into the unity of the race, is what remains for us to see ; that development which shall make all the nations of the earth one society, or one united family, when a man shall love and serve not his own nation merely, but all the nations of the earth, when in a word his sympathies shall flow forth towards every brother of the race, purely according to the good that is in him. Let no good man doubt this consummation ; the divine exist-

ence is thereby doubted. All history yearns for it. The whole course of Providence ensures it. Who that traces the beautiful Providential order by which the individual rises into the brother, the neighbor, and the citizen, *can* doubt that the crowning rise shall as surely be seen ; that, namely whereby the individual having already proceeded from the brother to the neighbor, and from the neighbor to the citizen, shall from the citizen rise into THE MAN,—rise into unity with all his race, giving to all men an equal regard, because all have the same divine parentage, and the same divine destiny.

Surely this is the Christian idea of human progress. Every dimmest prophecy is inwardly radiant with it; every mournful psalm is cordially joyful with it. The whole life of Christ was a sacrifice to it. How then has the church failed to enact it? Mainly, as Swedenborg has shown, by its persistent identification of goodness with mere merit, by its habitual degradation of virtue into a mere instrument of personal gain. Christian men have looked upon virtue, not as the absolute end of their existence, but as a means to that end, which is individual aggrandizement. They have accepted virtue as a divinely appointed means to a divinely appointed end, which is the individual aggrandizement of a portion of the race. They have regarded it as the established *price* of the divine favor, as entitling the saint to a more benignant treatment than the sinner, but not as in itself the sum of the divine bounty. Hence the morality of the church claims no root beyond the most superficial and variable ground of the imaginative faculty, and utterly disclaims the support of the serene and unitary reason. It presumes upon the divine regard for persons and classes, and denies His solicitude for humanity, or the race. It sees accordingly in man only a form of self love, and not of charity, or use. Thus while it has done much to avouch the accidental and superficial differences of the race, it has done almost nothing to demonstrate its substantial unity. Hence the imperishable interests of morality, or the fulfilment of the divine ends in humanity, imperatively demand the establishment of a new church, which, being based upon the deepest intuitions of the reason, shall also put itself in harmonious relation with the

laws of divine Providence, as revealed in the principles of natural order.

How this new condition of humanity is to be actualized, is a question which I do not propose to discuss with you. I hope however that the future issues of these Tracts may shed much probable light upon it. The question resolves itself into this : *whether it falls within the scope of divine power to create a virtuous race upon the earth.* The titular church takes the negative side of this question. It affirms that self-denial is of the essence of virtue ; that man *can not* be good without it ; and that any attempt of the Divine consequently to institute a virtuous progeny on the earth, a progeny in whom interest and duty, pleasure and conscience, shall perfectly harmonize and prompt to like issues, must necessarily prove fallacious. In short it denies the glorious kingdom which the Scriptures predict for the Christ on earth, and insists that the work of redemption is perpetually, and of its own nature, incomplete. The new or spiritual church, on the other hand, most definitely affirms the question. It declares this regenerate condition of humanity to be the distinctive promise of Christianity ; to be the inevitable implication of the truth of the Divine Humanity, and to constitute an indispensable basis and guarantee of the stability of the highest heavens. Remove this hope, says the church, and you convert christianity from a divine and universal truth into a passing superstition ; you vacate the actual union of the divine and human natures in the Christ, and consequently reduce the Divine into a wholly inoperative or impotent relation to His universe. The church concedes indeed that all the actual virtue of our past history has involved self-denial ; but then it alleges that this has been, only because humanity hitherto has been so little subject to divine order ; because there has always been so unrighteous a conflict between nature and spirit, between interest and duty, as to make it impossible for man wholly to follow the one without doing violence to the other. But while reason bids the church regard this as the infantile experience of humanity, revelation bids it behold in God-Man both the source and the pledge of a maturer development, when it shall lay aside childish things, and find in the cheerful obe-

dience of natural laws, a perfect satisfaction to every aspiration of the soul, and to every want of the body.

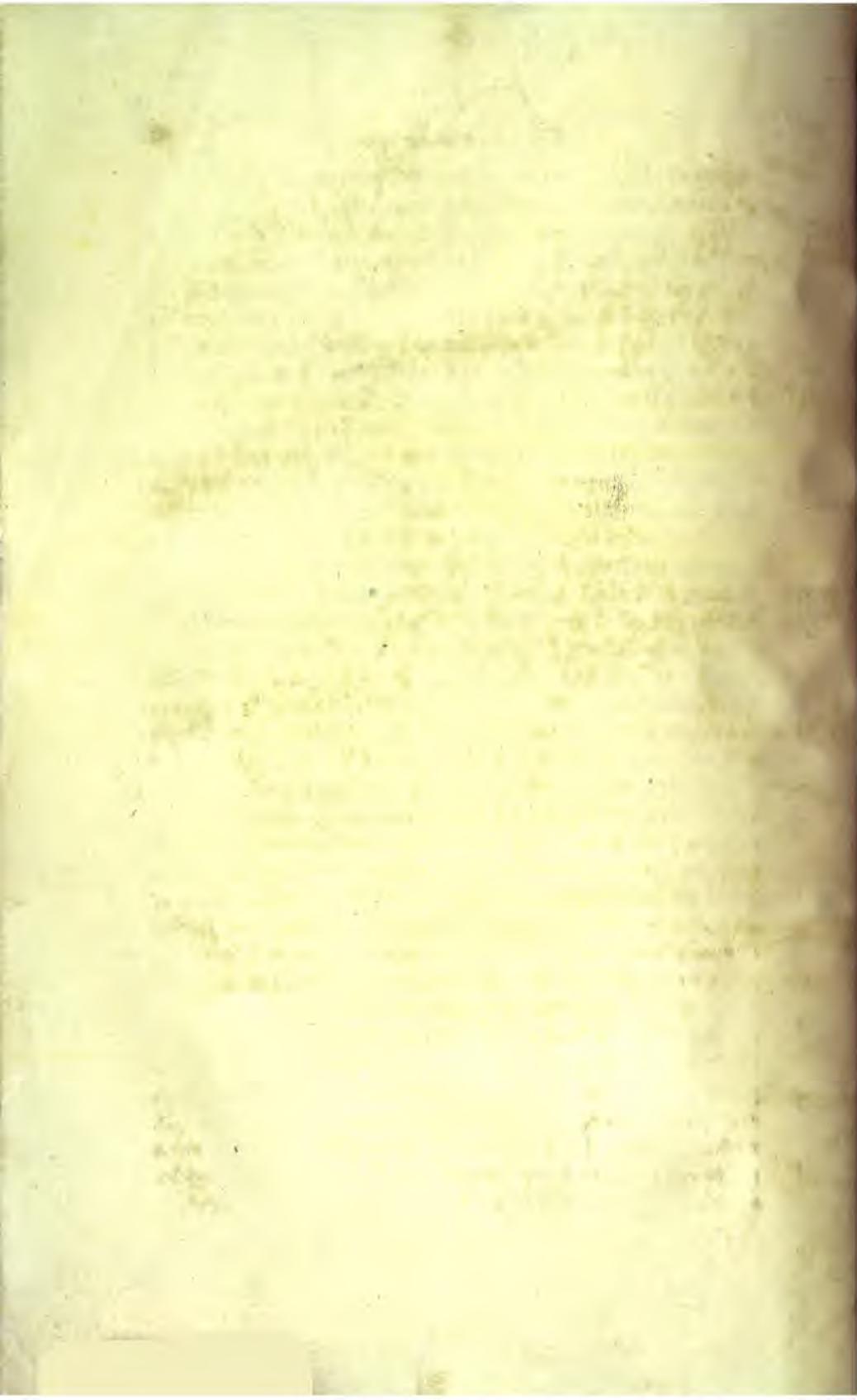
Thus you perceive that the coming church reverses no true verdict of history. It falsifies no lesson of past experience. It denies no fact of man's spiritual declension. It accepts in all its length and breadth the fact of self-love. But it reconciles all this historic experience with true Providential mercy, which absolutely exacts the evolution of an intellect in man, based in the stable harmonies of natural order. The endowment of this intellect is essential to the permanence of creation, and is the very end of the descent of Divine to the Human, and the union of the Human with the Divine. Thus the church reconciles the hitherto unmanageable fact of self-love with the unimpeded operation of divine laws; with the great ends of creative love and wisdom. It perfectly harmonizes the law of self-love in man, with the law of universal love in God. It does not bid the natural mind revoke all history in order to reascend to its primal celestial conditions: *it reproduces these celestial conditions themselves, in natural forms.* It no longer exalts the inward or real, at the expense of the outward or actual; it proves the one to be an every way fit and indispensable exponent, basis and continent of the other. It does not bid us blush for our past history, any more than you now blush for the mistakes and wilfulness of your infancy; for it proves every event of history to have been a necessary means towards the actualization on earth, of the perfect order which is only truly realized in heaven. Right action is the crown and end of all individual culture; of all individual growth in goodness and truth. So the subjection of nature to distinctly human uses, or to a perfect social method, is the crown and end of the divine benignity towards the human race. It is henceforth the open secret of Providence. In short the new church affirms the divinely wedded unity of matter and spirit, conciliates nature and regeneration, and harmonizes the profoundest truths of reason with the central fact of revelation.

Allow me now, in conclusion, once more to deprecate misunderstanding. I am sure that no attentive reader of these pages can construe them into an assault upon any existing institutions of public worship. No one has a truer enjoyment, in

many respects, of these institutions than myself, and I should be glad to lend my aid in purifying and extending their forms. In all your attempts to institute a purer ritual, a ritual which shall blend every highest method of art in the worthy celebration of the divine perfections, I accordingly feel a lively sympathy. But I can not confound any such institution with the church. The church is not primarily, nor yet secondarily, an institution for public worship. Properly, it is not an institution at all. The idea of congregation is not essential to it. It owns no locality but that which inheres in upright human action. It is a most internal, or divine, life in man, whose only genuine visible issue therefore is in every orderly natural action. In a word the true visibility of the church is evinced not in any merely professional institutions, however imposing, but in a regenerate social life. The new, or mystic Jerusalem is neither a temple nor a place ; for God inhabits no temples but those of his own construction, and He is equally present in all places. It is the regenerate earthly life of man, a life of complete subjection to the laws of the Divine Humanity operative in nature, and full consequently of innocent and ennobling delights.

I remain my dear Sir,  
Yours, &c.







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